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EXPERIENCES OF TRAINING ON AN EMPLOYMENT-BASED ROUTE INTO TEACHING IN ENGLAND

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EXPERIENCES OF TRAINING ON AN EMPLOYMENT-BASED ROUTE INTO TEACHING IN ENGLAND

Abstract

In this article, experiences of beginning primary teachers on an English employment-based route into teaching, called the Graduate Teacher Programme, are presented and evaluated. Factors affecting the progress of trainee teachers on the programme are explored, including prior work experience, expectations of the participants and levels of support provided by the schools. In general, those with prior classroom experience found the transition into teaching easier than those for whom this was a major career change, although schools often gave too much responsibility to those who had worked in schools before. Personal, informal support was regarded as vital in boosting trainees' often low self-confidence, whilst formal support was valued more in retrospect. Contextual features such as the culture of the school made a significant difference to how the beginning teachers perceived their progress. Findings are analysed with reference to studies of the Graduate Teacher Programme, mature students and workplace learning.

The Graduate Teacher Programme in England

Employment-based routes into teaching can be found in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Brookes, 2005; Haigh, 2003). These vary considerably in nature and little research has been carried out into whether they offer an effective induction into teaching. The Graduate Teacher Programme in England was set up by the then Teacher Training Agency (TTA) in 1997 in order to address a national shortage of teachers. It was designed to attract mature entrants to the profession, particularly those changing their career. The GTP enables schools to employ unqualified teachers, whilst training them to meet national standards for qualified teacher status (DfES/TTA, 2003).

In 2002, whilst representatives from the TTA praised the new scheme as a high quality route which had already brought 'well over 6,000 career-changers into teaching' (TTA, 2002a, p.2), a preliminary survey by government inspectors was highly critical of GTP provision overall (Ofsted, 2002a). The report identified considerable variation in practice

and concluded that: 'too many trainees are failing to achieve the high standards of which they are capable' (ibid. p.29). However, the report also noted that the GTP could be an 'effective route for training teachers' (ibid. p.10), where good practice was in operation.

Since 2002, the GTP has helped to fill teacher recruitment gaps in England (MacLeod, 2005); although a more recent inspection survey of GTP providers (Ofsted, 2005) found that the quality of training was still variable. However, the report noted that improvements had been made to the training route overall and that the best managers had 'a clear understanding of the distinctive demands of an employment-based route' (ibid. p.3). The report also commented on the quality of the candidates attracted to the scheme, who were 'highly committed' (ibid. p.14) and professional, with strong 'motivation and ability to get the most out of the training and experiences offered' (ibid. p.14).

The limited research so far into the GTP reveals a similarly mixed picture. For example, Foster (2000) found that, whilst there was enthusiasm in schools for a flexible programme which could help alleviate teacher shortage, the quality of provision was variable and, in some cases, trainee teachers were being exploited. More recently, Brookes (2005) highlighted the tension between models of teacher education and the potentially low quality of some employment-based programmes. However, he acknowledged that the scheme provided opportunities for mature entrants to train and that mentors in schools welcomed the GTP as a positive alternative approach to training. This is reinforced in some brief, first-hand accounts by GTP trained teachers (Parkin, 2002; Clarry, 2003), which stress the benefits of the scheme for mature entrants to teaching.

There is still a lack of published research on the experiences of beginning teachers who train through this route; hence the need for this article. Before turning to the case study trainees who form the focus of this research, it is important to contextualise them within a wider framework, firstly of mature students and entrants to teaching, and secondly of learning in the workplace.

Mature students and entrants to teaching

Although GTP trainees are not classified as students, because they are training 'on the job', their experiences as returners to learning have resonance with those of mature students, particularly those entering higher education. Many studies of this area focus on the experiences of women (e.g. Edward, 1993; Merrill, 1999; Reay, 2003) and emphasise the lack of confidence that they often feel returning to study, especially when compounded by the juggling of work and family responsibilities. On the positive side, the studies stress the high motivation to study of women returners, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the important contribution that their skills and previous life experiences can make. A study of (mainly women) teaching assistants returning to study is also relevant here (Drake et al., 2002). This found a similar mixture of low self-confidence among the teaching assistants in the higher education setting, coupled with determination to succeed and commitment to schools.

These findings are similar to studies of mature entrants to teaching, which also largely focus on women's experiences (e.g. George, 1998; Duncan, 1999; Griffiths, 2002). Whilst the difficulties of achieving work-life balance in such a demanding occupation are not underestimated, these studies highlight the positive skills which women can bring to teaching, such as time management, good organisation and the ability to relate to children and adults.

Reasons why people enter teaching later are particularly pertinent to the GTP route. A study of career changers entering teaching (Priyadharshini & Robinson, 2003) identified six main categories: parent, successful careerist, freelancer, late starter, serial careerist and young career changer, which may be useful in relation to the beginning teachers in this study.

Workplace learning

As the Graduate Teacher Programme is essentially a school-based form of training to teach, studies of workplace learning are arguably more relevant than those of traditional

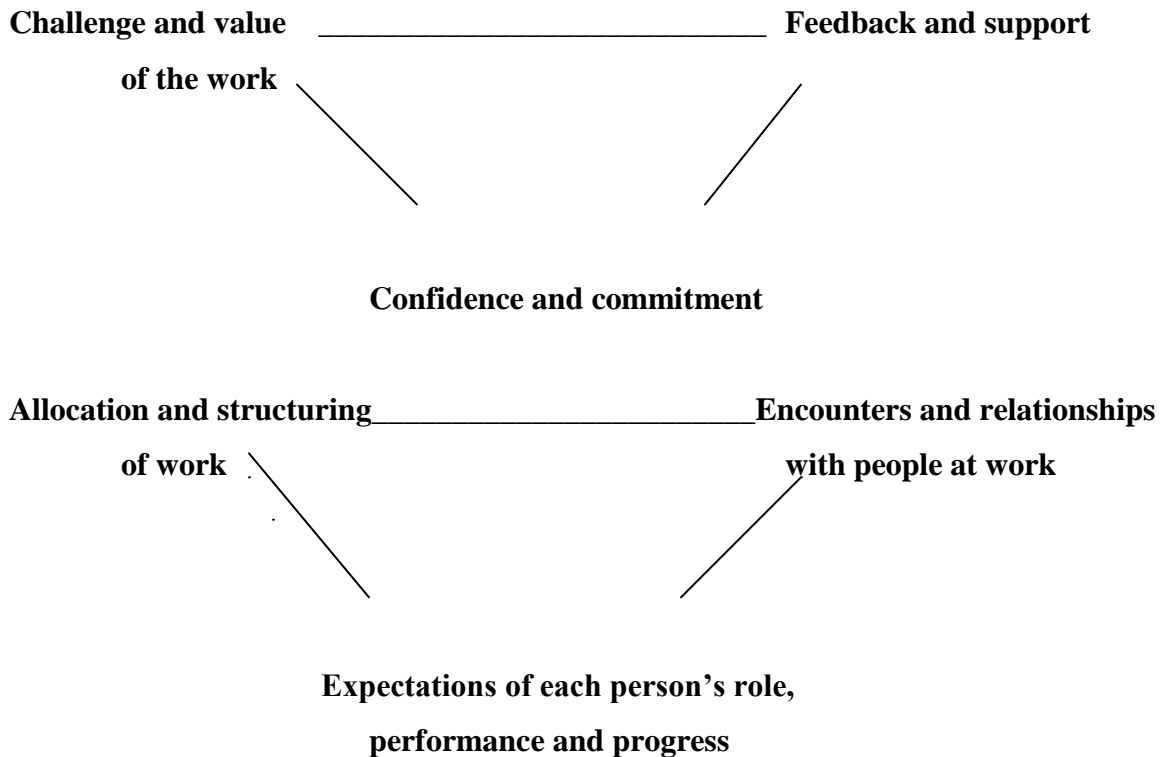
training routes, in order to understand the experiences of GTP trainees and the contexts in which they are working.

De Jong (1997) identifies five types of 'on the job' training, all of which take place in the workplace: on-site instruction, practice, supervision/coaching, study and development. These will be looked at with reference to the Graduate Teacher Programme in this study. Eraut (2004) further argues that most workplace learning takes place, not just on-site but literally 'on the job'. Learning theory (cf. Coffield, 2000) is useful in order to understand the ways in which such learning takes place, and the factors which may be significant in this complex process. Tracey et al (1995) and Eraut et al. (2000) stress the importance of the learning culture of the workplace, characterised particularly by the way work is organised and managed, and by the social climate of the work environment, including relationships with colleagues. Thus both formal and informal factors can be seen to play a significant role in facilitating or inhibiting development and learning.

Informal learning in the workplace (Gear et al., 1994; Coffield, 2000; Eraut et al., 2000), including professions such as teaching, can take place through observing and working alongside experienced practitioners, and this can be as or more effective than formal coaching or mentoring. Eraut (2004), drawing on findings from a number of large scale projects, proposes a model of workplace learning which takes the form of two triangles, depicting the work context and factors affecting learning within it (see Fig. 1).

The triangles denote the inter-relationship between factors. For instance, confidence was identified by project participants as overwhelmingly important in order to meet challenges at work, while the confidence to take these on depended on the extent to which learners felt supported (ibid.). This model is particularly useful when considering the experiences of beginning teachers on the Graduate Teacher Programme.

Figure 1: Factors Affecting Learning in the Workplace (Eraut, 2004)



Background

The particular programme that forms the basis of this research was set up in 2000 as a partnership between a local education authority (LEA) in the south of England and a local university. The LEA was facing an acute shortage of teachers in a financially deprived part of the region and the GTP was initially set up to meet this recruitment problem.

From the outset, the programme was planned to have a strong partnership component between the LEA and the university, and to operate along apprenticeship lines, with a taught course on a day release basis (cf. de Jong's types of 'on the job' training, 1997). These elements were praised by both Ofsted (2002a) and the TTA (2002b) and made the programme very different from others starting at that time and, indeed, from many others in current operation (Ofsted, 2005).

An important reason for providing a taught component was that many of the schools who might benefit from the programme were small, rural primary schools, who had not had trainee teachers before because they were a long way from the nearest universities. Because of their size and inexperience with initial teacher education, it was felt that they would not be able to provide full training to meet all the required standards for teaching (then operating under DfEE, 1998) without additional support. Thus, school expectations (cf. Eraut, 2004) of the role of beginning teachers following the GTP might be unclear until partnerships were more clearly established.

The target market was primary teaching assistants, most of whom were women with family commitments, who had neither the time, means of travel, nor resources to undertake a full-time training course. Many of these had built up considerable experience in their schools and would be happy to continue working there. This satisfied one of the preconditions for a successful GTP set out by Foster (2000). The schools were keen to support them in making the transition to class teacher, and the LEA felt that this would help provide the region with a stable group of mature entrants who were part of the community.

Over the five years of its operation so far, this programme has had high rates of completion (98%), retention (96%) and employment (98%), comparing very favourably with other initial training routes. There is now a stable intake of 25 primary trainees per year, who normally follow a one-year course. Recently, the programme received a very good inspection report from Ofsted (2004b) and was awarded accreditation unconditionally.

Methodology

A case study approach (Cohen et al., 2000) was adopted because of the scarcity of GTP trainees at the start of the research and the unusual nature of this particular programme at the time: its taught course and partnership components. The purpose of the research was to track beginning teachers through their training year, in order to identify key factors affecting their progress.

As university co-ordinator and link tutor in the first two years of the programme, I had inside knowledge which was positive in terms of gaining access and developing the beginning teachers' trust and co-operation. This insider status could well have affected the kind of data that I collected and the responses of the participants (*ibid.*). However, I sought to minimise bias by undertaking triangulation between respondents and data collection methods (*ibid.*), as well as checking my findings with school mentors, other course tutors and official reports. In addition, the case study teachers are drawn from the third year of the programme, with a different link tutor; although I still had a close connection with the programme, I was in more of an outsider role in relation to these trainee teachers.

Because the main focus was on the beginning teachers themselves, I have tried to foreground their perspectives and give them a voice in the spirit of feminist research (Letherby, 2003), rather than evaluating the programme itself in a wider way; that is, the case studies are of the trainees not the programme. Nevertheless, I do add some comments from my perspective as former co-ordinator, thus acknowledging the subjective aspect of the research process (*ibid.*). Owing to the small scale nature of the research, and the variety of Graduate Teacher Programmes in existence, my conclusions are tentative and I have not sought to generalise from them about other programmes.

Two main methods of data collection were carried out. Firstly, I drew on course evaluations completed by 46 trainee teachers (43 women and 3 men) half way through and at the end of the programme in the second and third years of its operation (23 each cohort). These explored the trainees' experience of the taught course and school-based training, their perceptions of the mentoring and support they were receiving, their views of the benefits of the programme and any problems they had faced. Secondly, follow up interviews were carried out with a sample of 10 respondents across the two cohorts, exploring the same areas in greater depth and following up any issues which had arisen from the questionnaires. The interview material formed the main basis of the case

studies, although questionnaire data is also referred to as a wider reference point and triangulation method.

From the interviews, four case studies will be presented from the later cohort who represent a range of gender, class, ethnicity and patterns of prior and in-course experience: Yvonne (white, working class), a former teaching assistant; Eileen (white, middle class), who had been an adult education teacher; Tessa (mixed race, working class), who had taught English as a second language; and Dave (white, middle class), a former social worker. All four were in their early thirties and successfully completed the programme. Names and some personal details have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Prior experience

The importance of prior teaching or school-related experience on the GTP is stressed by Foster (2000) and emerged as a key factor in this study. Because of the previous minimum entry age to the GTP of 24, all the beginning teachers in the sample had prior work experience. All the women had worked in schools before, as teaching assistants, voluntary helpers or unqualified teachers, whereas the three men had moved from non-school related work such as social work and computing. In terms of Priyadharshini & Robinson's categories of mature entrants to teaching (2003), all the men and a few of the women, such as Eileen, were 'successful careerists' and three women, including Tessa, could be classed as 'freelancers'. However, although most of the beginning teachers were parents (91%), this was not a sufficient category to explain their entry into teaching. Nor is 'serial careerist' an appropriate term to describe the progression of 80% of the sample (all women), for instance, from parent helper to teaching assistant to trainee teacher. I would suggest that the term 'planned progression into teaching' would more adequately summarise the way that Yvonne and others had moved through previous roles into the GTP.

For most of these GTP trainees, prior experience in schools contributed to their feeling of preparedness at the start of their training and their ability to cope with the transition to

teaching (see also Griffiths, 2002). For example, Yvonne felt that her year as a teaching assistant had helped her 'go in with eyes open...knowing how schools work'. However, although her previous work had given her skills in relating to children on an individual or small group basis, she and other former teaching assistants lacked confidence in managing a whole class (cf. Drake et al., 2002; Vincett et al., 2005).

Eileen also had transferable skills from her previous work, but from the very different background of teaching adult education courses. Eileen was able to transfer experience of classroom organisation, 'how to stand up in front of a class' and a range of teaching strategies. She said:

I would've been absolutely stumped if I hadn't had that...It was a great asset having all the little tricks up your sleeve.

However, she found it difficult to adapt her existing skills from adult education to meet the needs of primary age children, which she found 'quite daunting' at the start of the year. The transfer of skills from one context to another involves a complex set of interactions and learning (Berliner, 1987) and it is not surprising that Eileen and other GTP trainees (9 out of 10 interviewed) experienced some early difficulties and lack of confidence.

The importance of 'resituating' prior learning is stressed by Eraut (2003, p.119), who notes that the process involves 'both an understanding of the new situation and transformation of previous knowledge' (ibid.); therefore for those beginning teachers who came to the GTP with work experience unrelated to education, the transition to teaching could be very difficult indeed. For example, Dave had moved from a long career (15 years) in social work and, unlike the others mentioned, could find few points of connection with his previous work. This made it particularly hard for Dave to adjust to his career change; in his case, both confidence and commitment were subsequently low (see Fig.1).

School expectations

The valuable skills which many GTP trainees brought to the course sometimes gave rise to unrealistically high expectations on the part of their employing schools. For instance, Tessa was given responsibility for a class for four days a week at the start of her training, because of her previous teaching experience. Tessa reported in the mid-course review:

I have been teaching practically 80% on my own. I have had to be the teacher as the school use me as the supply.

Although Tessa had worked as an unqualified teacher overseas for four years, she felt that she only had a 'rough idea' about teaching when she started and it 'took a long time - a good term to get a handle on discipline.' The school regarded her as more capable than she herself felt and 'expectations from others that I know and have experienced more than I have' were problematic.

The possibility of exploiting beginning teachers on the GTP, by giving them too much responsibility too early, has been identified by Foster (2000) and more recently by Ofsted (2005). In Tessa's case, there was no overt intention to exploit on the headteacher's part, but unclear expectations gave rise to an inequitable allocation of work at first (see Fig. 1). After negotiation with the headteacher, Tessa's responsibilities were reduced and she team-taught with another teacher for a term. In this and other trainees' cases, an early identification of their skills and needs would have been helpful, and this was subsequently put in place on the course. The importance of an initial needs analysis and appropriate induction is stressed in many studies (e.g. Yeomans & Sampson, 1994; Furlong & Maynard, 1995), particularly for GTP trainees (Ofsted, 2005).

Unrealistic expectations of this kind arose partly because of staffing problems in the schools and partly because of uncertainty about teacher training and particularly the GTP as a new route. For example, Tessa's school had never had a GTP trainee before, so at the start of the year: 'the school didn't know what my role should be and at times I felt like I didn't belong.' However, unclear expectations decreased as schools became used to the

programme, being cited by 78% of trainees in the earlier cohort but only 20% in the later one. Yvonne was representative of the majority of the later group, when she wrote that:

My school is so supportive of me - I've never had to cover other classes and they never leave me to flounder.

Interestingly, putting a lot of responsibility on a trainee from early on, whilst it created extra pressure, could be regarded in hindsight as positive. For instance, at the end of the year, Tessa wrote:

When I took over teaching the whole class as a class teacher, this was a great way for professional development of class management, planning, marking etc.

It was only when her confidence had grown that she could see the challenge of her early experiences in a more positive light (see Fig. 1 & similar findings in Edwards, 1993; Duncan, 1999). Much of this confidence growth depended on the degree of support that trainees received from their schools and it is to this that we now turn.

School-based training and support

Because the GTP is essentially a school-based course, the schools' contribution to trainees' professional development is vital, as stressed by Ofsted (2002a & 2005). It was in school that all five types of 'on the job' training identified by de Jong (1997) took place. From the beginning teachers' responses, three levels of school-based training and support were identified as important to their early development on the GTP: structural, professional and personal (cf. Yeomans & Sampson, 1994), with personal support being considered the most valuable during the training year itself.

(i) Structural training and support

Structural support and training were provided by schools through their procedures, policies and practices, such as planning, behaviour management and assessment. This was usually led by the headteacher, a key figure in promoting good practice in the

primary school (Ofsted, 2002b; Sturman, 2003); strong leadership is identified as a major factor affecting learning in the workplace (Tracey et al., 1995; Eraut et al., 2000). Many GTP trainees were based in well organised schools, providing good models of primary practice (as identified by the LEA and in Ofsted reports), which enhanced their own professional development. For example, Yvonne described the school where she trained as: 'led from the top, people were unified and policies in place. There was continuity and established ways of doing things.'

The value of having the opportunity to visit and teach in other schools during their training was appreciated by the GTP trainees, enabling them to see their own school's approaches in a different light and gain a wider perspective. It was particularly important where trainees were based in schools that were less well organised than Yvonne's. More than one school experience is now mandatory for all training routes in England (DfES/TTA, 2003), although the second school placement is still of variable quality on the GTP (Ofsted, 2005).

(ii) Professional training and support

Closely allied to structural support was the professional training and support provided by headteachers and staff within the school, particularly by mentors, who had the main responsibility for in-school training. The importance of the mentor's role has been highlighted in many studies of initial teacher education (e.g. Yeomans & Sampson, 1994; Edwards & Collison, 1996). On this GTP, 53% of the trainees in both cohorts cited good mentoring and strong support. For example, Yvonne said that she had 'learnt from the best': her mentor had been very experienced, 'exceptional' and had set high standards which she had adopted for herself. Eileen praised her mentor for giving 'total support' and wrote in her end of year evaluation:

My personal mentor has been brilliant. Her expertise and professionalism in this area has provided me with a much smoother path than other trainees.

Eileen's comment revealed that some mentors had not been so good as her own. In the end of year questionnaires, 32% of the trainees felt that they had lacked mentor time or support, although this differed between the two cohorts: 90% of the later group reported having a regular weekly mentor meeting, compared to only 78% of the earlier group. The interviews revealed that the quality of the time spent with mentors could also vary. Such variations in mentoring have also been cited by Ofsted about the GTP nationally (2002a & 2005).

Problems sometimes arose because the mentor was new and, in spite of having some training by the university, was uncertain about what the role involved. For instance, Tessa described her mentor's support as 'reactive rather than proactive...most things are done on the hop!' Sometimes a reactive approach was due to pressures of work on mentors and other teachers: Tessa felt that her mentor and class teacher 'counted the cost of supporting me very closely and were not prepared to go beyond this'. Several mentors went on long-term sick leave or left the school during each year, which did not help the continuity of support for the trainees. Retention of teachers has recently been a major problem in the UK (Sturman, 2003) and turnover of mentors is not restricted to the GTP route.

Other problems with mentoring arose because of difficulties in adjusting to the relationship on both sides. For some GTP career changers who had held responsible positions in other jobs, it was difficult to find themselves as learners and at the receiving end of criticism. For instance, Dave described his changing feelings vividly:

Mentoring was the hard part and the very useful part in the end. You have to take a lot of feedback and not always praise. It made me feel inadequate and slightly resentful...In the end I realised I was with a very good teacher....a great role model.

Dave struggled with teaching early in the course and it was only later that he could see the value of mentoring he had received and acknowledge the problems he had faced

earlier. The stages in development that Dave went through, and the consequent effect on mentoring, are common for any beginning teacher, as demonstrated in other studies (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997). However, it may be particularly hard for 'successful careerists' (Priyadharshini & Robinson, 2003) such as Dave, whose difficulties in transferring skills and reluctance to accept feedback inhibited his confidence and ability to meet new challenges in school (see Fig. 1).

GTP trainees also received much professional support from other staff in the schools. Support took many forms, such as working alongside the class teacher in a team teaching situation, as described by Tessa:

We worked like a job-share...It was good experience. I learnt to compromise. We had to be very clear about discipline, work together and agree on how to work.

Tessa saw this as an important part of her professional development, especially as, like Dave, she had not initially got on with the teacher concerned. Working alongside experienced practitioners has been identified as an important form of work-based learning in the professions (Gear et al., 1994; Eraut et al., 2000; Jacklin et al., 2006).

(iii) Personal support

Professional and personal support often overlapped: 90% of the beginning teachers mentioned highly supportive staff who helped them with problems and this was regarded as vital to their survival, as in other studies (Duncan, 1999; Jacklin et al., 2006). Many of the trainees were based in small, rural primary schools where the teachers worked very closely together. For example, Dave was in a school with only three classes and four teachers; this 'close-knit' staff were 'all willing to put themselves out.' Like Dave, Yvonne found the personal support provided by the staff and parents to be invaluable in helping her through the year:

There was a very tight supportive network of staff, there to give a mental 'whack' on a human level, answer questions, [but] not overly so.

As a former teaching assistant, she was well known by everyone and this helped her make a smooth transfer to a teaching role. Her description of the way the staff operated suggests an honest, direct approach but done in a caring way: the combination of a 'mental 'whack' on a human level' worked well for Yvonne who did not wish to be over-protected. Good relationships in the workplace have been identified as another important factor in workplace learning (De Jong, 1997; Eraut et al., 2000), affecting expectations of performance and progress (see Fig. 1).

Central training and support

Although university and LEA tutors regarded the weekly central training day as an important way of providing the beginning teachers with some background theory and wider perspectives on primary education, to the trainees themselves, it was seen as more valuable as a time to get together with each other and share experiences.

The course tutors were praised for high quality, informative inputs by only 16% of respondents; for example, Eileen mentioned the value of lectures and books to enhance subject knowledge, whilst only 21% commented on the value of assignments. Central training was more often cited in connection with gaps; for instance, 50% of beginning teachers would like to have had more sessions on non-core subjects such as music and physical education. Link tutoring visits to schools were mentioned more frequently (63%) and highly praised for the 'helpful support' given, as Yvonne put it, as well as for advice and feedback. Link tutors provided a bridge between the central and school-based training and could mediate if there were any problems in schools, as mentioned earlier.

Personal support provided by other trainees was valued highly by many beginning teachers (64%). For instance, Tessa highlighted the importance of the weekly contact with other trainees at the taught course sessions, 'as you are very isolated in school.' For

many trainees, others in the group became close friends and helped them through the difficult times; Yvonne regarded them as 'vital for our sanity'. One of the main problems facing the GTP trainees was that of juggling work and family commitments, particularly on such an intensive course. Support from family was identified by 50% of trainees as important, as found in other studies of mature women entering teaching (e.g. Duncan, 1999; Griffiths, 2002).

Preparedness

For most GTP trainees, immersion in school life on four days a week was regarded as good general professional training. Involvement in aspects of school life and work, such as planning, parents' evenings and assessment, as well as extra-curricular activities such as sports, drama productions and fieldtrips, was cited by 85% of the GTP sample as helping them to feel well prepared professionally by the end of their training. For example, Eileen commented favourably on 'the way I've been treated as a teacher from the start,' whilst Dave talked enthusiastically about 'taking groups for athletics and running the football club.' There was some variation in other professional areas: questionnaire findings were evenly divided between those who felt well and less well prepared in areas such as special educational needs and behaviour management.

The trainees felt well, or less well, prepared in similar subject areas to beginning teachers from other training routes in England (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Jacklin et al., 2006). For example, questionnaire responses showed that all the beginning teachers in both cohorts felt well prepared in core subjects, particularly numeracy and literacy, and less well prepared in non-core subjects by the end of their training. This was unsurprising, given the emphasis placed on core subjects both in schools and the taught course because of national requirements (DfES/TTA, 2003). For instance, Dave felt particularly unprepared in music:

I have a little smattering of what one's expected to know. It's difficult when it's such an intensive course.

Dave felt that he only learnt a limited amount by observing other teachers and would have welcomed more input on the course, although he acknowledged the constraints. Similarly Yvonne found it 'a little bit unnerving' to have to teach subjects such as geography in which she lacked confidence, although she cited the school's subject co-ordinator as particularly helpful. Some differences arose because of the prior knowledge and skills brought to the course by the trainees, for instance, Eileen's first degree was in Art so she felt well prepared in this. Their feelings of preparedness were also affected by the schools' input into their training and professional development; for example, Yvonne's school was not strong on literacy, which gave rise to a lack of confidence in this area. One of the obvious limitations of the GTP is the amount of time spent in one school, and this is addressed below.

Towards the first year of teaching

As the GTP trainees approached their first year as qualified teachers, they reflected thoughtfully on their training on this new route, as illustrated in some of the earlier sections. Those interviewed were able to compare their training schools with their first appointments in terms of the quality of the planning and procedures, the nature of the staff and leadership and the social background of the children. They could evaluate the quality of the training they had received in the light of these comparisons. For instance, Tessa was impressed by the preparation for the coming year that was being carried out in her training school:

In the last week of term we were doing short-term planning, and had already done medium term plans - very professional and organised, very clear.

She felt that she could take some of what she had learnt into her next school where, in comparison, there was very little planning for the new year in place. However, she and others were only able to see the value of the structural aspects of their training towards the end of the course; during the year Tessa was more concerned about the perceived lack of support from her mentor and other teachers. I would suggest that a wider perspective on their training was only possible when the beginning teachers began to have close

contact with another school and move away from the insularity of being in one context, which one day a week's central training could only partially alleviate.

The beginning teachers had a mature outlook on their first term in teaching, making sure that they were well prepared in terms of planning and resources and were realistic about what lay ahead, being determined, as Yvonne put it, 'to keep a happy medium and not to be burnt out by Christmas.' Yvonne expressed her professional readiness very well:

I'm nervous but I think I'll be OK...You have to have the confidence to move away from scripted lesson plans - real teaching isn't so precise - to say, "That's not going so well so we'll scrap that"...You need to be so much more flexible.

Yvonne and some others already showed evidence of having moved beyond the survival and coping stages that many new teachers go through in their early careers, towards a realistic and balanced approach (Jacklin et al., 2006). This was further demonstrated by an interview I had with Dave after only a month in teaching:

I'm finding paperwork easier than last year, finding more time for my running. Time management is better - I seem better prepared....I'm sitting down on Saturday mornings and doing all my planning....The Head is hoping to put me in as PE co-ordinator....He seems to think I've got a career ahead.

Career aspirations may be particularly prominent among male teachers (see also Duncan, 1999; Griffiths, 2002); however, Dave was a trainee with low self-esteem at the beginning of his training and his interview account marked a huge developmental shift in his professional approach.

The trainees' success gave a huge boost to their self-esteem and confidence: for example, Yvonne wrote that her biggest achievement was 'seeing myself grow as a person and a teacher'. For beginning teachers like Yvonne, who had been a teaching assistant, the GTP had provided access to teaching which they might not otherwise have had:

It's served me very well. I'm very grateful for it. It's enabled me - and people like myself - to move on. I wouldn't have been able to take on a full-time course.'

Eileen commented on the particular suitability of the programme for mature entrants to teaching: 'tailor-made for a mature, school-experienced graduate.' These points reinforced findings of other studies of the GTP (Foster, 2000; Brookes, 2005) and other personal accounts by GTP trainees (Parkin, 2002; Clarry, 2003).

Key factors

In its first years particularly, the Graduate Teacher Programme was regarded with suspicion by some teachers, because it was unknown in the schools (Foster, 2000; Ofsted, 2002a). However, this situation is decreasing as schools have more positive experiences with the programme and partnerships are strengthened (Brookes, 2005), as I also found during the research, although the variability of provision is still a national concern (Ofsted, 2005).

In this small study, one of the major factors which affected the progress of the GTP trainees was the extent and nature of their prior experience. Those who had already worked in schools were better prepared to start their training than those coming from other occupations. This factor, together with the ability to transfer existing skills to a new context, was vital in an employment-based route where formal training outside the school was limited (Eraut, 2003; Brookes, 2005). However, some schools gave too much responsibility early on to those who had prior experience, as a result of unclear expectations (see Fig. 1).

This particular programme had elements of each of the five types of 'on the job' training identified by de Jong (1997), but the amount of each component varied according to the individual school context. From a tutor's point of view, schools with a well-structured approach, with strong leadership from the headteacher and well organised mentoring, provided a more effective environment for training than those where these aspects were

less evident (confirmed by Ofsted, 2005). However, from the beginning teachers' point of view, what they valued more highly was the personal support that they received from their mentor and other staff, as this had a direct effect on their self-confidence and perceived ability to make progress (see Fig. 1). For example, Dave compared the school where he undertook a second placement unfavourably with his main school because the teachers at the other school were 'not the same 'knit' of people' and he felt that 'if I'd been there I wouldn't have had the same sort of support.'

Whilst structural aspects were recognised as important to professional development only towards the end of the year, informal learning was seen as more important during training, including observing and working alongside experienced practitioners, as other studies of work-based learning have found (Tracey et al., 1995; Eraut et al., 2000). Immersion in the culture and organisation of the school was an important way in which beginning teachers on the GTP learnt and developed. As Tessa described:

Professionally I learnt an awful lot.... I was taken on board as part of the team, with responsibilities for planning and generic issues... I really appreciate that now.

Some beginning teachers, like Tessa, only fully realised the extent of what they had gained from their schools when they were about to start their induction year in schools which were less well organised. I would argue that the strength of the immersion process which characterised this apprenticeship approach was also the biggest limitation of the GTP: trainees could only widen their horizons when or if they changed schools at the end of their training. Because of this, the importance of a placement in another school during the year cannot be underestimated.

Individual personalities and the ways that they interacted with others and their environment were also important, as can be seen from the case studies, although evidence of this was more implicit. Overall, most GTP trainees in this study felt well prepared professionally, although there was variation in this because of school experience; all

those interviewed had a reflective outlook on their training and induction years and considered the programme ideal for mature entrants to teaching.

Conclusions

Findings from this small-scale study are inevitably limited and not necessarily generalisable. However, there are several implications arising from the research for improving this particular programme, which may be useful for employment-based routes into teaching more generally.

Firstly, a requirement for at least some prior experience in schools for those intending to embark on a GTP seems sensible and is now a prerequisite on this and other programmes nationally. Secondly, the importance of an initial need analysis of each beginning teacher, leading to an individual training plan, is recognised by Ofsted (2005) and is now a national requirement for all GTPs. Thirdly, the training of mentors and other teachers in schools, which is vital on any initial training programme, is even more so on an employment-based route, where the role of the school is central.

Last but not least, the need for extensive experience in at least one school other than the training school, is crucial in order for beginning teachers to develop a wider perspective on all aspects of a teacher's role. The second school experience is now emphasised as particularly important by Ofsted (*ibid.*), but it might be useful to consider introducing a minimum length for this, such as six weeks, as some programmes nationally only include a week or two in another school.

Although Ofsted (*ibid.*) rightly stresses the need for substantial, high quality input on subject knowledge on the GTP, from the trainee teachers' perspective, this is less important than time out of school meeting other beginning teachers on the same route, in order to share experiences and provide mutual support.

Methodologically, Eraut's model of learning in the workplace (Fig. 1) has been particularly helpful as an analytical framework, as have other studies of work-based

learning and mature students. There is a need for further research, particularly into the professional development of GTP-trained teachers (see Griffiths, 2004; Griffiths & Dudley, 2006), to see how well this employment-based route into teaching prepares teachers longer term.

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